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nonprofit community.

Testimony before the Judiciary Committee Re:

Juvenile Justice Related Legislation

Julia Wilcox, Policy Specialist, Connecticut Association of Nonprofits (CT Nonprofits)

Public Hearing Date: March 2, 2009

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Good afternoon, Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Julia Wilcox, Policy Specialist for the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits (CT Nonprofits.) CT Nonprofits is a membership organization that represents more than 525 nonprofit agencies. Approximately 300 of our member agencies contract with State government for a variety of human and social services. This afternoon, I am proud to represent the Juvenile Justice Division of Providers who contract with DCF and Judicial / CSSD.

I join you this afternoon to provide overarching commentary, on behalf of the Nonprofit Juvenile Justice Network – as opposed to recommendations specific to each proposal. Our primary area of concern, is related to the Governor's recommendation and legislation related the proposed:

DELAYED IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RAISE THE AGE INITIATIVE: (Oppose)

For years, nonprofit providers of juvenile justice services, as well as national experts in the field, have come before you and testified in favor of raising the age of jurisdiction. In addition, recommendations have included expanding age-appropriate (and/or gender - specific) treatment programs as the most positive and productive alternatives for the youth of the state. As we are all aware, in 2007, Connecticut's legislature raised the age of adult jurisdiction from 16 to 18, effective January 1, 2010. With the exception of the most serious and violent offenders, minors would be addressed within the Juvenile Justice System. This was a wonderful acknowledgement of the positive impact that such a shift in philosophy and process, would have on the youth and families of our state. Individuals with far greater expertise than I, have presented supporting statistics and findings – from both a statewide and national perspective. These statistics illustrate not only the 'functional' cost savings. They also reflect the savings in terms of 'human capital,' or the effect that the reduction in recidivism has upon the families and communities of our state.

During 2008, we continued to see an overwhelming amount of support for the direction of the state, which for the first time, was beginning to mirror national trends of providing appropriate treatment and support of our Juvenile populations. For this reason, we were completely disheartened to learn that in light of the state's economic condition, the Governor is proposing that this initiative be delayed for two years with a new effect date of January 1, 2012.

We would implore the Legislature to do everything in your power, to assure that the critical progress and momentum that has been made in this area, is not lost due to short-sighted 'cost savings.' In reality, delay in the implementation of the RTA Initiative, will end up costing the state dearly – in both the dollars that will be necessary to address the increase in unmet needs of the juvenile population, and the 'loss' in terms of delayed progress for the individual youth and families involved.

As such, we cannot, in good faith, support legislation which would seek to delay implementation. In these fiscally challenging times, this strategy is not only best for the populations directly served through the juvenile justice system, but for the state of Connecticut – as an extensive, long-range cost savings measure, which not only increases public safety, but strengthens the very fabric of our communities. As you continue your efforts to address the state budget crisis, it is essential to view the support of home and/or community-based, juvenile justice services (as provided by the nonprofit provider network) not as an 'expense,' but rather, an 'investment' in human capital and the welfare of our state.

It is essential to note, that the Nonprofit Provider Network, stands ready to continue our efforts to partner with the state (Legislature, DCF and/or CSSD) to assure that each and every aspect of implementation -- regardless of the timeline, is managed in the most thoughtful, collaborative, and productive manner possible.

In closing, I would encourage you to contact providers of Juvenile Justice related services within your local communities. The ability of the state of CT to adequately meet the needs of its residents is greatly dependent upon the ability of the Private Provider Community to sustain a vibrant network, which will continue to serve as the ultimate safety net for Connecticut's youth and families at risk.

I thank you for your time and consideration of these critically important issues. I would be pleased to answer any questions at this time.

Related Information of Interest:

- ⇒ Juvenile Jurisdiction Policy and Operations Coordinating Council: <http://www.housedems.ct.gov/jjpocc/index.asp>
- ⇒ Advances in Juvenile Justice Reform, 2007-2008: The National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN) compilation of advances in juvenile justice reform from across the country.
http://njjn.org/media/resources/public/resource_943.pdf
- ⇒ Using Adolescent Brain Research to Inform Policy: A Guide for Juvenile Justice Advocates:
Published by The National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN)
http://njjn.org/media/resources/public/resource_847.pdf

For additional information, Please do not hesitate to contact:

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----- Related Bills Under Consideration: 3/02/09 -----

S.B. No. 674 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING LOCAL EXPENDITURES RELATED TO THE CHANGE IN THE AGE OF JUVENILE COURT JURISDICTION. (JUD): *Statement of Purpose:* To delay local tax burdens related to improvements necessitated by the raise in the age for juvenile court jurisdiction.

S.B. No. 1057 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING APPOINTMENT OF COUNSEL AND GUARDIAN AD LITEM IN CERTAIN JUVENILE MATTERS.

To: (1) Clarify the role of an attorney and guardian ad litem in certain child protection cases, and (2) revise provisions concerning the appointment of counsel in certain juvenile matters.

H.B. No. 6386 AN ACT DELAYING IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGISLATION RAISING THE AGE OF JUVENILE JURISDICTION. To implement the Governor's budget recommendations.

H.B. No. 6451 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE COMMISSION ON CHILD PROTECTION AND THE CHIEF CHILD PROTECTION ATTORNEY.

To: (1) Limit the number of transcripts the Commission on Child Protection is required to pay for in an appeal, (2) provide that mandated reporters who are hired by certain child protection attorneys comply with attorney-client privilege standards, (3) provide independent legal counsel for any child who is alleged to be neglected or uncared for or subject to a termination of parental rights petition, and (4) make a conforming change to clarify the Chief Child Protection Attorney's ability to contract with private law firms.

H.B. No. 6574 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE TRAINING SCHOOL AND OTHER JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITIES. To prohibit the establishment or expansion of a state juvenile detention facility without the approval of the legislative body of the municipality where such juvenile detention facility is to be established or expanded.

H.B. No. 6575 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO PROVISIONS RAISING THE AGE OF JUVENILE JURISDICTION. To amend provisions related to the inclusion of youths sixteen and seventeen years of age within the juvenile court with respect to certain criminal matters.

H.B. No. 6580 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE JUSTICE. To: (1) Stagger the implementation of provisions raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction by implementing such provisions for youth sixteen years of age in 2010, and implementing such provisions for youth seventeen years of age in 2011, and (2) allow a court to order assessments and services for youths in youthful offender proceedings and youths adjudicated to be youthful offenders comparable to the assessments and services provided to juvenile offenders in the juvenile court.

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